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UCLA Issues Second Report on Proposition 36; Treatment Completion Among the Key Findings

About one-third of drug offenders who entered treatment programs during the first year of California's Substance Abuse and Crime Prevention Act (SACPA) completed their treatment, UCLA researchers report.

The second-year independent evaluation of SACPA, also known as Proposition 36, passed by California voters in 2000, was released today by a team of researchers at UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute's Integrated Substance Abuse Programs. The 148-page report offers a detailed profile of the flow of offenders through the SACPA pipeline across all 58 California counties during the program's second year (the 12 months ending June 30, 2003) and provides an update of findings from its first year.

Also significant is that about half of SACPA clients in both of the program's first two years were entering treatment for the first time in their lives. In the most recent year, first-time clients were more commonly Hispanics, men, younger drug users (over half were 35 years of age or younger) and methamphetamine users. Many first-time clients have a drug use history of 10 years or more.

"SACPA continues to introduce thousands of new clients to treatment – an important move toward eventual cessation of drug use," said Douglas Longshore, a UCLA behavioral scientist who is the evaluation's principal investigator.

"SACPA is voluntary and agreeing to participate is the first step," Longshore said. "The second step is entering treatment: About 70 percent of those who agreed to participate in the first year showed up for treatment."

Among those who took the second step (entered treatment), 34 percent completed treatment. Among all those who took the first step (agreed to participate in SACPA), 24 percent went on to complete treatment. These completion rates show, Longshore notes, that offenders in SACPA are faring about as well as others referred to treatment by the criminal justice system.

In a sample of SACPA and non-SACPA clients with high-severity drug problems, the evaluators found that placement in outpatient rather than residential treatment was more common for SACPA clients. Outpatient treatment of high-severity SACPA clients was particularly common for African Americans.

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“Counties try to place SACPA clients in treatment as quickly as possible,” said Longshore. “This means most people are placed in outpatient treatment, which is more plentiful and less costly.” Among the possible solutions cited in the report are redistribution of residential capacity within counties and expansion of day treatment capacity.

A stay of at least 90 days is considered the minimum for a beneficial effect of treatment, and half of SACPA offenders stayed in treatment that long. Such rates for length of stay are typical of drug users referred to treatment by criminal justice. African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans were less likely to reach the 90-day threshold.

Upon voter approval of Proposition 36 in 2000, the governor’s office designated the Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs (ADP) to lead implementation and evaluation of SACPA. The program represents a major shift in criminal-justice policy. Adults convicted of nonviolent, drug-related offenses and otherwise eligible for SACPA can now be sentenced to probation with drug treatment instead of either probation without treatment or incarceration. Offenders on probation or parole who commit nonviolent, drug-related offenses or who violate drug-related conditions of their release may also receive treatment.

ADP, in a competitive bid process, chose UCLA Integrated Substance Abuse Programs to conduct the independent evaluation of the program over five and one-half years, starting in January, 2001 and ending June 30, 2006.

UCLA’s second-year report also found that the size and characteristics of the SACPA population remained stable when compared to the first year. A total of 50,335 offenders agreed to participate in the program during its second year and 35,947 entered treatment; in its first year, 44,043 offenders agreed to participate and 30,469 entered treatment.

In the program’s second year, about half of those entering treatment (53 percent) reported methamphetamine as their primary drug, followed by crack cocaine (13.2 percent), marijuana (12.1 percent) and heroin (10.2 percent). The report also notes that success in treatment was particularly difficult for people with heroin addiction. Treatment completion and duration would likely improve for heroin-using clients, the researchers suggest, if methadone maintenance were more available.

The complete Evaluation of the Substance Abuse and Crime Prevention Act 2003 Report is available online at <http://www.uclaisap.org/> (as of Sept. 23, 2004).

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UCLA Integrated Substance Abuse Programs is a unit of the UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute. The UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute is an interdisciplinary research and education institute devoted to the understanding of complex human behavior, including the genetic, biological, behavioral and sociocultural underpinnings of normal behavior, and the causes and consequences of neuropsychiatric disorders. More information about the institute is available at www.npi.ucla.edu.

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